

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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Date: 09-03-2025

Scripture: Ephesians 6: 10-12

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¹⁰ *Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might.*

¹¹ *Put on the full armour of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

¹³ *Therefore, take up the full armour of God."*

When we think about battles that we are facing, or wars that we are in, we often think externally. We see the wars happening in different parts of the world. Yet, Paul reminds us that a lot of the battles that we engage in are more spiritual than physical. As he writes this letter, he ends with a final word of warning and encouragement. *"Be strong in the Lord, and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the strategies of the devil."*

Today, I want to unpack these verses and see what God has for us. I'd like to explore what it means to be strong in the Lord. I'd like us to understand God's mighty power. What is this mighty power? And then, to some extent, the reality of our spiritual enemy. How can we stand firm against his strategy? We acknowledge that we are in a battle, and that God has given us everything that we need to stand firm in it.

Paul starts this section by saying, "Finally," which makes you wonder what has he said till now that he's culminating and saying, "So, to wrap it all up." In the previous chapters, 1-4, Paul has laid out who we are in Christ. In the letter to the church at Ephesus, there are so many points where he says who we are in Christ. 'In Christ' is sprinkled right across. that's what he has looked at in the first three chapters.

Then in chapters 4, 5, and 6 till verse nine, he talks about how we should live. What kind of lives should we live as Christians, or ones who are in Christ.

Then in vs. 6, 10, he prepares believers for what he feels is going to be a spiritual war to prevent us from living out the kind of life that we have to live as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

So, that's where he is. He's saying: This is who you are in Christ. And this is how you ought to live as sons and daughters of Christ.

And then he says: But there's going to be opposition to that kind of living. And that's what we're going to look at. He says: As you look at opposition, you need to understand a few things. Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

BE STRONG IN THE LORD.

What does it mean to be strong in the Lord?

1. **Rely on God's strength.** We're not relying on our own strength, but we're relying on God's strength. Our strength as we know, is limited. God's strength is unlimited, infinite. And it makes sense that we don't rest our battles on limited resources, but rest it on one who has unlimited resources.

2 Corinthians 12:9 says, “My power is made perfect in your weakness.” It’s when you turn to Him and acknowledge that He is the One who has everything, and I only exist in weakness, that God’s power is made known.

2. **Stand firm in the faith.** We stand firm in faith against all opposition. Strength in the Lord is about spiritual resilience. That’s a strong word, a word full of meaning. It means we don’t give in; we don’t give up. When opposition comes, we stand firm and say: I’m not going to back up. I’m not going to give up on the purposes that God has for me. I’m going to continue to stand.

1 Corinthians 16:13 says, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.” So, we hold on to God’s truth, His righteousness and promises when facing trials, temptations and attacks.

3. **Be empowered by His Spirit.** It’s not just about believing in God’s strength. It’s about actively allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us and apply that strength into all of our situations. That’s what enables us to live victoriously.
Zechariah 4:6 says, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of Hosts.”

WHAT IS GOD’S MIGHTY POWER?

I want to give you three identifiers for God’s power:

1. **The power that raised Jesus from the dead.** God’s greatest demonstration of power was raising Jesus from the dead, proving that no force, sin, or death, or Satan can ever overcome His power. God’s mighty power!
Ephesians 1:19 says, “His incomparably great power for us who believe the same power that raised Christ from the dead.” That power is what he’s asking us to bank on.
2. **The power that defeated Satan.** Through Christ’s victory on the cross, Satan has been defeated. We know that. Believers now operate under the authority of Christ. As the song goes, “I’m no longer a slave to fear; I am a child of God.” No longer are we under the authority of the dominion of Satan. We have been freed from that, and we now have chosen to be under God’s sovereign identity.
Colossians 2:15 says, “having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”
3. **The power that works in us daily, every moment.** God’s power isn’t stuck with just some historical event that we think about – the crucifixion or the resurrection. His power is evident in our lives every moment. It’s the power that helps us to overcome sin and suffering and fulfill our calling.
Ephesians 3:20 says, “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that works in me or within us. There’s a tremendous power that is working for us to help us to face the attacks that are coming our way.”

PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD.

Put on the full armor of God so that we can stand firm against the strategies of Satan. What does it mean when we talk about putting on the full armor? Because we can’t take real pieces of armor and put them on. It simply means that we get into a place of spiritual readiness that will allow all the arrows of the evil one to be thwarted.

One of my favorite television shows is Blue Bloods. It's a story about New York City cops and all that they do. When they get a tip that there's going to be drugs changing hands, and such things, they go for a bust. One of the first things that they do is to put on the Kevlar vest which is a bulletproof vest. That's what they wear in preparation; that's not what they take to fight.

So when Paul says "Put on the armor of God," he's saying to put it on to be prepared for the fight that you're going to be in. The armor is not our strength but God's.

The next verse tells us to take up the whole armor of God so you may be able to withstand in the evil day and to stand firm. So we make sure that we have the armor.

STAND AGAINST THE STRATEGIES OF SATAN.

The strategies of Satan are very real and deceptive. Put on the whole armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the evil one.

In any war, people who are in charge, like the generals, will always try to find out the strategies of the enemy. No general worth his salt will not do that. You have to find out what the tactics of the opposing person is to be able to counter them. And the same thing with Satan. If Satan is on the rampage against you and me, it makes sense for us to say: How does he come? what is he going to use? What are his tools? What are his weapons? I need to know that so that I can effectively counter them.

How does Satan come to us?

- **Through lies and deceptions.** What does Satan do? He twists the truth. Remember what he said to Eve in the Garden of Eden. Did God really say? Can he really do? Are you sure you believe this? What he tries to do is to make us doubt the veracity of God's word. And the moment we begin to doubt that, then we begin to lose trust in Him. And when we lose trust in Him, we lose our dependency on Him. We end up thanking God for a meal or little things, but we never trust Him with the totality of our lives because of the lies that Satan brings.
- **Through temptation.** He comes against us with temptation, hoping that it will lead to sin. He tries to lure believers into sin and compromise. He did that with Jesus. At least he tried to do that with Jesus. When Jesus was in the wilderness to be tempted, the temptations were in the flesh, power and pride.
 - 1st temptation was about the flesh – physical needs. You're hungry. Turn these stones into bread. Feed yourself. You don't need to go hungry. Feed the flesh.
 - 2nd temptation was about power. I'll give you all the nations of the world if you bow down and worship me. Power and authority, I'll give you that.
 - 3rd temptation was pride – a testing of God's will. Throw yourself down. The Bible says that He will send His angels to prevent you from hurting your foot against a stone.All temptations to subvert the will of God for us, the purposes that God has for us. And yet, we're asked to withstand it.
- **He comes as the accuser and one who condemns us.** How does he do that? He tries to make us feel that we are unworthy of God's grace. How? He brings up past sins and failures. And we think to ourselves: Why is this coming back to me? I'm forgiven, or I forgave. How does this come back? We then need to remind ourselves that we are forgiven. He does it by twisting God's truth into condemnation. You did that; you're never going to be forgiven for it.

He brings condemnation upon us. and yet, God never condemns. The Bible says, "Therefore, now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." If you're in Christ Jesus today, you cannot come under God's condemnation because he doesn't condemn. God convicts. "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus said to the woman who was caught in adultery, "but go and sin no more." Turn from what you've been doing. He brings conviction upon us, never condemnation.

He creates doubt about God's love and forgiveness. That thing you did, that's beyond God's ability to forgive. That's too big. He'll never forgive you. That stain is too deep, too dark. And yet, the Bible says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive. But Satan will have you think that that thing that you're dealing with is beyond grace. Grace cannot come to bear on this.

Then he attacks the mind with lies and false thoughts. What does he say? You're a nobody. You'll never amount to anything. You're a failure in life. You can't even do this. These are the words that he comes and puts these thoughts in our heads. And yet we know that each one of us is a somebody because we are made in the image of God. No image of God can be a nobody. Each one of us is a somebody. So, he comes as the accuser.

- **He comes to bring division and conflict.** How does he do that? he sows discord in relationships and churches and communities. He seeks to tear apart relationships, weaken churches and create chaos in communities. Why does he do that? Because where there is unity, God is glorified. Jesus' high priestly prayer was: *Let them be one, just as You, Father, and I are one.* Unity brings glory to God; disunity doesn't.
- **And he seeks to break apart relationships.** Again, he does that by planting seeds of pride and selfishness. Pride is the root of most divisions. Satan tempts people to prioritize their own opinions, desires and reputations over unity. What does he do? He whispers: You deserve more recognition. You're not getting what you deserve. They don't really appreciate you. Why should you apologize first? Let them. These are words that he speaks and pride leads to conflict, offense and resentment, breaking relationships.

Proverbs 13:10 says, *Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.*

- **He will try to spread gossip and slander.** Satan thrives in gossip because it destroys trust. It breeds suspicion and it poisons relationships. It's insidious. That is why, when we take new members through our membership covenant, one of the requirements is that they will not enter into gossip within the church. If there's any issue, bring it to the leadership and/or to the pastor.

Proverbs 16:28 *A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.* How often have friendships broken because of gossip.

James 4:11 *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.*

- **He stirs up offense and unforgiveness.** Satan magnifies small offenses so that they turn into huge big divisions. He whispers: They really meant to hurt you. You should never forgive them. You look weak if you let this go. You got to jump in, do something.

Unforgiveness allows bitterness to take root, which destroys relationships and churches. Ephesians 4:31 says, *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive, in order that Satan might outwit us, for we are not unaware of his schemes,* Paul says to the church in Corinth.

- **He also tries dividing families and marriages.** Satan attacks marriages and families because strong families build strong churches and communities. So he tempts spouses with selfishness, busyness, infidelity and unresolved conflict. If he can destroy the home, he weakens the next generation. The next generation goes into the home with less expectations than they really should have.

Just before we came back, and I'm talking about 30 years back, I was reading an article that came out in Christianity Today, written by a minister of a personal encounter that he had on an airplane. He says, "I was sitting there, and I had a person sitting next to me. We got chatting and he asked me what I did, and I replied, 'I'm a minister of Jesus. I pastor a church.' This person said, 'Oh, I'm a minister too.' And he said, 'Really? Where do you pastor?' He replied, 'I'm a minister for Satan.' This man said, 'Satan? How do you be a minister to Satan?' And he said, 'We do the same thing. We pray to him. We ask him to intercede in the affairs of this world.' He says, 'What do you pray for?' The reply: 'Right now, our focus is to break every Christian marriage.'"

That was the prayer of all those who belong to Satan, and who are active ministers of Satan. There are Satanic churches around the world, where they gather together. And if we think about it, we may feel that it's so far removed from us.

Paul is bringing it right back to us in this context. He says, "Watch out. When you think that this will not affect you, is when it affects you, because then you're in an unguarded state." Think about the marriages that have broken. Gallup has statistics that show that the number of divorces in non-Christians and the number of divorces in Christians is about the same. If should be a strong family unit if God is at the center. So, he comes to divide families and marriages.

Mark 3:25 *If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*

How do we overcome Satan's strategies of division?

- Humility is a good place to start if pride is at the start of it. Pride fuels divisions. Humility fosters unity.
- Reject gossip and slander. Speak only about what builds people up.
- Forgive quickly. Holding on to offenses gives the enemy a foothold that then becomes a stronghold.
- Guard your home and your relationships. Invest in strong marriages and families.

So, we see that Satan thrives in dividing. Why? Because a divided church, family, or society becomes weak. A united people of God is unstoppable. People are united. The church is an unstoppable force and we must recognize his schemes. Reject division and pursue unity in Christ.

Paul hasn't stopped here. He ends this whole section by saying that the battle is not against flesh and blood, meaning that it's not a physical thing. It's not like you can physically catch hold of somebody. He says, "There's another dimension that you know nothing about." It's the battle that's going on in the spiritual realm. It has to do with evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, mighty powers in

this dark world, and evil spirits in the heavenly places. There's precious little actually, that's in the Bible that tells us about the spiritual dimensions of what goes on.

Evil rulers and authorities in the unseen world. We're talking of demonic forces. Daniel gives us a little window into that. When God sent the angel with the answer to Daniel's prayer, the angel was stopped by the prince of Persia. Daniel ch.10. And then it took three more weeks of Daniel praying for more power to come from heaven to overcome this prince of Persia and bring the answer to him. That's probably the only window we have that talks about the conflict in the spiritual realm, that

- A. There's opposition to God's purposes coming down to us, and,
- B. It takes prayer to open more of God's power to bring victory over that area.

How important then must prayer be! To think that maybe I quit before there was enough prayer going up to bring that answer. So many of our prayer requests that we have, that we harbor in our hearts, are prayers that we've stopped talking about anymore. We say, "God knows about it. I've mentioned it." And yet, when we read scriptures like this, we are made to understand that we must not just pray, but keep on praying, in the present continuous tense. Don't give up. When we get to heaven, we'll understand what power the prayers had. But for now, we have little vignettes like this that tell us that the more prayer we raise, the more power gets released from heaven and victories happen in the spiritual realm.

Mighty powers in this dark world. Paul says 'next thing.' The Greek for that is *kosmokratoros*. *Kosmo*, as you know, is world, *kratoros* is rulers. So, world rulers, he's saying, come under spiritual attack. There's attack on these people who have maybe a governing to do in this world. Oppressive regimes, false ideas, or moral decay are areas that are affected.

Evil spirits in the heavenly places. The fallen angels and demonic forces that operate in this realm. In the heavenly places, meaning it's not in our sphere. In the very physical part of us, but it can come through deceptions that come into the mind, temptations, oppressions that Satan can bring to us to manipulate, deceive, and turn us away from God.

When we look at all of this, we cannot help but feel: My goodness! I never knew that all of these things are happening to me. I sometimes wonder why this happens to me. Why am I being led in this way? Why am I getting these kinds of thoughts? And Paul is saying, "There's a whole dimension that you have no idea about. But, we have the weapon against it. You need the armor of God to withstand all of these dimensions.

CONCLUSION

Paul would say: Spiritual warfare for you and me is very real. But so is our victory in Christ. The whole idea of what has said is not to bring fear, but to bring to us a certain understanding that the victory has already been won. The way to counter all these threats has already been given to us. We just need to put on the armor. Have the armor in place as we face the things of this world.

RECAP

- Be strong in the Lord and not in our own strength.
- Rely on God's mighty power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.
- Put on the full armor of God and stand firm against every scheme of the enemy.
- We don't fight for victory; we fight from victory. Jesus has already won the battle for us.

We go forward remembering that our enemy is real, but he's defeated. The battle is spiritual, but our weapons are mighty in God. Our strength may be limited, but God's power is more than enough for us. The battle belongs to the Lord.

Amen.